

Beware of holiday rental scams

The Easter holiday season is nearing and getting away for a holiday beckons. Short term rentals, however, can knock the rest and recreation right out of you if you end up getting scammed.

"Unfortunately, the trend of fake holiday house listings is a reality, and it would be best to double check before handing over any of your money," says Pam Porter of Jawitz Properties Plettenberg Bay.

You may be in a hurry to secure your spot in the sunshine, but taking precautions before you book is important. Using reputable agents or travel sites is essential. By booking through a listing on a classifieds site for example, there is definitely a chance your deposit will disappear. Be wary of cellphone numbers as the only contact available.

Some rentals may require the full amount to be paid upfront, but if possible, arrange to only pay a deposit so only some of your money is at risk.

"As you usually have to travel some distance to get to a holiday home, it is difficult to check in person that the property you want to rent actually exists.

"Requesting photographs of specific amenities in the home might be a way of verifying that the person you are in contact with has access to the property you want to rent," Porter says.

"Try searching for reviews from other guests as well."

At this time of year many people are also looking for new places to rent and unfortunately rental stock shortages give rise to longer-term rental scams as well. As with shorter-term rentals, there are some steps you can take to avoid becoming a victim.

"Again, classified websites are flush with property listings, and scamsters are copying rental details to the letter from reputable agents and advertising properties they are not authorised to rent," says Francois Venter, director at Jawitz Properties.

"You are completely within your rights to insist on seeing the agent's credentials, including a valid fidelity fund certificate that you can verify on the Estate Agency Affairs Board website (www.eaab.org.za), as well as the paperwork proving the agent is allowed to rent out the property," he says.

"Never trust an agent who is unavailable to meet you in person. Insisting that your deposit will secure the rental without any official paperwork is definitely dodgy. Before you consider transferring any money, the first step is to complete an application offer that needs to be accepted by the landlord.

"A lease agreement will then be drawn up to be signed and only then should the rental deposit, rent and lease or administration fees be payable," Venter says.

Property
Weekend Argus (Sunday Edition)